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SUBJECT: PLEASE FIND ATTACHED - FOR YOUR PERUSAL

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THE FUTURE OF HELLENISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

1. PREAMBLE

- The future of Hellenism in South Africa, with particular reference to the influence of the Greek Orthodox Religion on the role it will play in assisting to preserve Organised Hellenism and Greek Orthodoxy in South Africa. The emphasis will be to retain the younger generations, third and fourth, as members of the Greek Orthodox Faith - to continue to be active members of the Hellenic community or, at the very least, to continue their association with the Hellenic Community.
- Because some of my statements may be considered controversial, I would like it to be known that I must not be quoted out of context, in order to make an issue of certain statements or to use these statements to direct any accusations at me.

At the outset I want it to be known that I am totally Hellenic and would not change my Greek Orthodox Faith for anything in the world. I am proud to be able to practise my Hellenic traditions and customs.

- In order to appreciate the problem, I will briefly examine how the Hellenic structure and the Greek Orthodox Faith established itself in South Africa and how the economic, social and political changes in South Africa have affected the Hellenic structure. Furthermore and very important - how the changes have also influenced the Greek Orthodox Church.
- One would have to examine how the new Church policy regarding the spread of the Christian Orthodox Religion in South Africa, particularly among the previously disadvantaged, will affect the Hellenic structures and the Hellenic Orthodox members.

More importantly, is the "Church Power or Rights" applied to organised Hellenism and the ramifications thereof (in both cases) on the future of Hellenism in South Africa.

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2. **Some definitions to enable us to have a Common Understanding of the Terms Used :**

- **Faith** – i.e. the belief in Religious doctrines, especially as it effects character and conduct. One such aspect is the system of Religious Belief, namely Christianity via the Greek Orthodox Religion.
- **Religion** – One of the prevalent systems of Faith and Worship, namely in our case, Christianity, through the medium of the Greek Orthodox Religion and the practise of Sacred Rights established by the Church.
- **Folklore** – Traditional beliefs and customs affecting a group of people, nation or race – in our case Hellenism.

(Above - Oxford Dictionary).

- **Organised Hellenism** – The Hellenic Community Structures and Associations and Brotherhoods are all under the umbrella of ***The Federation of Hellenic Communities of South Africa***.

3. **INTRODUCTION:**

- Religion and Faith has become inseparable from custom and in some instances Folklore, as in all Countries and Nations. It is an integral part of life of a Nation.
- Greece and Cyprus is a very good example reflecting the inter-play of Religion, Faith, Customs and Folklore in the life of the people. A Nation with a Mono Religion – up to 95% or greater - excluding the Turkish population in Cyprus. They have ancient culture customs that are well established, in some instances rituals and Folklore – deeply interwoven with the Religion.
- Hellenism in the rest of the developed and developing world, such as South Africa, has continued to retain and enjoy these customs and Folklore as individuals, families and as organised communities, many of which - if not most, are interwoven with the Greek Orthodox Religion.

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- One simply has to look at the Church building, the Byzantine or Basilica architecture, which forms a feature of the Hellenic landscape.
- In South Africa it is easy to recognise the Greek Orthodox Churches built by the communities and one or two belonging to the Patriarchate of Alexandria.
- The individuals' life, due to the nature of our Greek Orthodox Religion, such as Namedays etc. followed by the custom of *Panigyria*, are a very integral part of the Hellenic Nation.
- The Religious acceptance of venerating Saints, and celebrating the Saints Namedays with all the customs and traditions that are known to all, is very much practised. One such example that was recently celebrated was "Meatfare Sunday" followed by the Carnival celebrations throughout Greece, Cyprus and all Greek Orthodox communities throughout the world.
- The Church however does have something to say about this and I quote : "The equation of the feast through masquerade balls, festivals and revelry bares no relation to the meaning of the Feast which our Church wishes to stress. The custom of the Carnival is connected to ancient idolatrous customs, which cultivate a false and temporary joy, which helps us to forget, for a while, the problems which occupy us."
- Although, and agreed, the depth of the Religion and Faith does not make Carnivals a part of Meatfare Sunday, unfortunately the traditional and almost "legendary" way of life that developed throughout the years, forms a very integral part of our customs and whether we like it or not, linked to our Religion as Hellenes.
- It must be remembered that the Hellenes are an old nation, having passed through many evolutions through to Christianity and immediately before modern times, they faced the 400 years of enslavement. These stages were experienced as a continuity and not in isolated boxes. Therefore, it would not be correct to try and preserve Hellenism, when denying areas of tradition passed from ancient times i.e. from generation to generation.

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- Another good example is the 25th day of March "Ευαγγελισμός της Θεοτοκου" - the day of Hellenic Independence which has a very important symbolic Religious celebration followed by the customary Hellenic celebrations, such as parades etc.

This is very much an Hellenic Day and cannot be appreciated as such by any other Orthodox Christian followers other than those who are Hellenic and live their history.

4. South Africa:

- Settlers in South Africa developed Communities with the main goal being to provide Ecclesiastical, Scholastic and Cultural activities and to ensure that the future of their children continued with the heritage of the Greek Christian Orthodox Faith, its customs, traditions and imported from their homeland Greece or Cyprus.
- The Church – The Patriarchate of Alexandria, did not follow the Hellenic Settlers, which was the case with the Calvinistic and Catholic Settlers in South Africa. No attempt was made to preserve Greek Orthodoxy or to bring Greek Orthodoxy to the Hellenes in South Africa during the early settlement period, although at the time Alexandria, the Seat of the Patriarchate was booming, both financially and culturally and as a consequence, undoubtedly financial means were available.
- It was left to the Hellenes themselves, the Settlers, to form their own community structures and provide the facilities such as Church buildings, schools and the funding to sustain a Priest and years after, the provision of an Archbishopric to preserve what they knew as Hellenes which embraced their Religion, language and customs – "the Ithi and Ethi of the Nation".
- In the long run the Patriarchate merely had to provide the Priest sustained by the local organised community and overtime established an Archbishopric in South Africa.

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- Historically, therefore in South Africa, the Hellenes provided all these facilities on a very organised basis. They however did not place themselves on an isolated island. There was continuous co-operation with other ethnic – language and religious groups.
- Organised Hellenism formed a very integral part of the South African Nation and today still is considered an integral part of the Nation. Save to mention that the Greek language is listed in the South African Constitution.
- The Church - the Greek Orthodox Archbispopric – our Religion, **was a stalwart in supporting the Hellenic movement** and was always an integral part of the movement. This was achieved as a result of the highest form of co-operation between "the Patriarchate of Alexandria", "the Archbishop for the time being", Political Leaders and others from Greece and Cyprus.

Organised Hellenism benefited and blossomed as the unwritten respect co-operation, understanding and support by one and all, was practised.

- The Church, without the financial support and efforts provided by the organised Communities in South Africa, could not survive.
 - The recognised structure of Hellenism, i.e. the Communities, Brotherhoods, the declaration of Hellenic Communities and Associations strongly supported by the willingness of Hellenes, particularly in latter years the second, third and even fourth generation wanting to retain their Religion custom through the medium of their organised Hellenism ensured that the Church remained alive.
 - Their willingness to retain and sustain their Religion and custom is portrayed by the many Churches that Organised Hellenism built throughout the Country.
 - The Church did not have the financial strength to provide the necessary infrastructure – but the Church did co-operate knowing that it relied for its survival and to enable the Hellenes to retain their faith on the willingness of sacrifices of Organised Hellenism.

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5. **Changes :**

- Changes since the fall of the Eastern Communist Block, followed by the collapse of Apartheid and the establishment of Democracy in South Africa, brought about many challenges and changes :
- Due to the challenging Political, Social and Financial environment, many Hellenes chose to leave the country. Many however, have chosen to remain in South Africa and be part of the new South African Nation. The desire to continue with their recognised and established Hellenic structure in order to preserve what they have inherited from their forefathers – their Greek Orthodox Religion and all the "Ithi and Ehti" of Hellenism.
- Changes however, were not only confined to the political and social structure, but it influenced the Church Leaders who in their wisdom and quite rightly so entered into a programme of missionary work among the Africans in particular who wished to follow the Orthodox Faith.
- This however is beginning to have a material affect on Organised Hellenism and followers of the Greek Orthodox Faith due to the procedures and methods adopted by the Church Leaders resulting in not only a drain of financial resources, but also one would say the non acceptance and even "loss of interest" by the followers, the newer generation - resulting in the weakening of the Hellenic structure and the leaving of the Greek Orthodox Religion and following some other Christian Faith.
- Do not forget the saying "charity begins at home" – there is so much hunger, poverty, illness, unemployment in our own Hellenic Community that needs to be taken care of. Can we afford dissipation and consequently produce half-baked results throughout.

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- **Now more than ever, Organised Hellenism and the Greek Orthodox Religion, due to the reduction of resident Hellens with the obvious ramifications, both to the Organised Hellenic structure and the Church, the support and co-operation of one and all is needed as in the past. That is the unequivocal support of the Church Leaders and their fullest co-operation with Organised Hellenism and not to only pay lip-service.**
- One grants the fact that perhaps the Church is not aware of the damage they are effecting as a result of the methods adopted to achieve their mission.

The perception of how the Church is going about its business and how it is effecting Hellenism, is creating a lot of concern and problems.

- The dissipation of financial resources among Hellenism has a marked effect on the Hellenic structure and their future. It must be borne in mind that at all times it was a handfull of Patriotic supporters who always contributed to Organised Hellenism, but with the advent of the Church seeking its own financial support, this has had the result of weakening the financial support towards Organised Hellenism, as the influence of the power of the Church has been preferred – many a times due to personal influence or the recognition offered by the Church.
- The Hellenic structure unfortunately is in danger of totally dissipating. The Church will however, continue to enjoy some financial support from individuals, whilst the spirit of Greek Orthodoxy prevails among the Hellens – but this will not be ongoing as the Hellenic support will become less and less as far as the Church is concerned and the followers will also become less and less.
- **The Church and Organised Hellenism must be seen to fully co-operate in order to overcome the difficulties faced and the strengthen both the Church and Hellenism, thus all enjoying their goals. Dogmatic dictatorial methods cannot be tolerated in a so-called atmosphere of co-operation. Unfortunately, we have a lot of these that have come to the fore in recent times, which is affecting and hurting many Church followers – I ask is this the correct perception or policy to benefit one and all?**

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6. **Missionary Work :**

- Orthodoxy is not for the Hellenes only – as we have seen throughout the European and Eastern Nations, where Orthodoxy exists. Christian Orthodoxy is for all and the Church quite rightly seeks to embrace all those who wish to follow the Faith.
- At the outset it must be stated that Organised Hellenism, Hellenes in general are very much in support of the Missionary work.
- However the achievement of the Church's programme must not be at the cost of Organised Hellenism, which as I have previously stated will require the unequivocal support of the Church, in order to ensure that the structures remain intact and furthermore, to discourage the younger generations from leaving the Faith and the community which is very prevalent at the moment.
- The Missionary work must continue, but the continued existence of Organised Hellenism is imperative. Undoubtedly in the long run the Church will achieve its Missionary goals – but this must not be at the expense of Hellenism in South Africa.
- It must be remembered that over time the new African Orthodoxy will consist of many different ethnic groups and will require their Church Services to be conducted in their own language. This will require much effort and resources to be achieved and consequently the support of one and all will be necessary.
- The mission/programme, must be well planned so that it may be successful.
- A weakened Hellenic structure will not be of assistance and it cannot also be relied on Hellenism to finance such a vast programme.

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7. SUMMARY

- For many years the Leaders of the community have stated that the Greek Orthodox Religion was losing the younger generation due to them not understanding the service in Greek.
- The Church has understood this problem and from the time of Archbishop Paul Lyngris, some English was introduced in the Church services and has continued and even improved under the present Archbishop Seraphim.
- It is appreciated that less and less of the younger generations are learning Greek which is causing them to drift from both the Hellenic structure and the Orthodox Religion. Those concerned, namely the Hellenic structure and the Church Leaders should immediately concern themselves with revitalising the learning of the Greek language which will have the effect of strengthening both the Hellenic structure and the Church.
- The so-called difficulty of understanding the Faith and its Sacred Rights needs organised talks and Catechism classes.
- The continued presence of Greek Orthodox Church Priests who are of Hellenic background and have a full understanding of the problems and way of life of the Diaspora, must at all times officiate at Greek Orthodox Churches.

The Churches are Greek Orthodox and therefore it is not sufficient that followers and members of Hellenism be served by any other Priest, other than Greek Orthodox. The mere fact that a person follows the Orthodox Christian Faith is not sufficient for Organised Hellenism and does not in my opinion qualify the person to serve Hellenism, their customs and traditions.

- A concerted effort must be undertaken by the Church to reverse the outflow of our younger generation and continue to belong to the Greek Orthodox Faith.

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- It is known that as soon as they move away from the Greek Orthodox Faith, which is the backbone of Hellenism, then all other Hellenic structures also suffer as they also disassociate themselves with Hellenism.
- **The Church must not "frighten" the Leaders of the communities in order to achieve its goals by threatening the removal of Priests or closing of Churches if they do not follow or concur with the Church Leader's programme.**
- **The Church must not reinvent the wheel and continue to form committees and structures that are already functioning and successful in organised Hellenism.**

As previously stated, the Church Leaders and those of Hellenism must sit down and co-operate fully with a common programme for the benefit of the Church and Hellenism.

8. CONCLUSION :

- There has to be full co-operation between the Leaders and Organised Hellenism to achieve:
 - The retention of Hellenism and all its traditions and customs.
 - The assistance by organised Hellenism to promote missionary work and to extend it into achieving Orthodoxy with each Ethnic group.
 - At all costs a schism within the Church movement must be avoided. A similar exercise such as that in Australia and other Countries will simply result in more of our third and fourth generation Hellenes leaving the Faith as a result accentuating the downfall of the Hellenic structure.
 - We appreciate that the Church is an independent and self-governing Organisation with its own Power and Rules. The mystery of these Power and Rules seems to alienate people, particularly the youngsters who are alienated by the so-called "politics" of the Power and Rules.

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- Its Power however cannot be enforced on the individual and Organisations. This will result in tremendous difficulties and problems, resulting in the followers of the Faith, leaving the Greek Orthodox Religion and going elsewhere. The Church Power cannot prevent this movement under any circumstances, therefore the Church Leaders must be aware that their self-structured power can be destructive.
- The Church therefore must utilise its Power and organisation to do what has been done for the Hellenes in the past and not to be the cause of Organised Hellenism to become a part of South African history.
- The statement of His Beatitude, The Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa, Petros VI, which is – I quote :

"1. With regard to the status quo of the Community churches:

- 1.1 *That the Community churches will remain as they have always been, i.e. Hellenic;*
- 1.2 *That the Community churches will continue to function as in the past;*
- 1.3 *That the operation of the Communities will continue on the same basis as in the past;*
- 1.4 *That the rumours that the Patriarchate plans to take over the Community churches are totally unfounded and that the Patriarchate has no such intentions;*

2. With regard to the Communities, and their churches being involved in the missionary program of the Archbishoprics:

- 2.1 *The program involves only missionary work and it does not involve proselytization, because the Greek Orthodox Church does not proselytize. Those who wish to convert to Orthodoxy do so of their own desire and free will.*
- 2.2 *Missionary work will take place separately and independently from the Communities and the Community churches.
In this regard the Metropolises will build their own churches to accommodate, promote and conduct missionary work and thus they will not involve the Community churches."*

must be seriously practised and furthermore, ensure that the Church Leaders and others within the Church movement, co-operate and ensure the retention of the Hellenic structure and hence, assist in the survival of Hellenism in South Africa.

- Unfortunately, if this is not done, Hellenism and the Greek Orthodox Religion will be but a memory for many of our youth in South Africa.

Lip-service is not sufficient.

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Ladies and Gentleman,

Our youth and those remaining must be encouraged at all costs and everything must be done to assist them to remain Hellenic in all walks of life, as in the past, both as members of the Greek Orthodox Faith and members and supporters of Organised Hellenism in South Africa.

A concerted effort must be undertaken to examine and to put into practise, a method for solution that will encourage our youth to remain within the structure of which we are all so proud.

I THANK YOU.

P STATHOULIS

12 March 2003

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